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# “Just say No”: Organizing Against Militarism in Public Schools

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*In an effort to counteract the growing militarization of schools, military counter-recruitment (CR) has emerged as an effective grassroots movement across the United States. Led by a small number of local activists, CR utilizes community organizing methods to confront the structures supporting military enlistment as a viable career option. Despite operating with limited resources, counter-recruitment has secured key legal and policy victories that challenge the dominant social narrative about military service. Three examples of counter-recruitment are profiled to illustrate the different tactics and strategies used for successful organizing within a culture of militarism.*

*Key words: militarization of schools, counter-recruitment, community organizing, tactics, strategies, militarism*

At a time of heightened militarism and involvement in long-term wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, there are few overt signs of an active and successful “peace movement” in the United States. Despite significant opposition to the invasion of Iraq and public apprehension over expanding the war in  
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Afghanistan, two successive administrations have maintained a notable consistency in the use of U.S. military force, ostensibly to “protect” American security. Presidents Bush and Obama have also sustained record levels of military spending since 2002, while other forms of the U.S. national security state have grown apace. Fear of additional terrorist attacks in the wake of September 11 have led to an open-ended “War on Terror,” including an expansion of domestic and international intelligence gathering—spying—on U.S. citizens and “foreigners” alike (Murray, 2010). Popular culture, most notably film and television, has largely avoided critical scrutiny of this “new American militarism” (Bacevich, 2005), while public displays of nationalism and support for the military have suppressed political dissent.

In spite of this apparent hegemony of beliefs, a growing movement of community organizers and activists opposed to U.S. foreign policy and the growing militarization of schools are engaged in a battle for the hearts and minds of young Americans. Military counter-recruitment (CR), an effort to neutralize recruitment into the armed forces, has emerged as a key method among those disillusioned with the more traditional tactics and approach of the mainstream U.S. peace movement. With an estimated 150 local CR groups operating in different venues and utilizing various organizing tactics (Castro, 2008; Friesen, 2010), counter-recruitment is focused on the increasing presence of military recruitment within public education. While CR organizing exists across the United States, it is largely a grassroots effort to resist war and a broader culture of militarism by emphasizing clearly defined—and what organizers see as achievable—goals linked to the “symbolic violence” represented by military recruiters in schools and local communities.

In this article, we analyze three examples of counter-recruitment in the United States. We examine the respective strategies and use of community organizing tactics by organizers, evaluate the similarities and differences in approach among these examples, and assess the efficacy of CR efforts. After noting the growing presence of military recruiters in educational settings, we locate the work of local CR groups within Friesen’s (2010) model of five symbolic struggles between CR activists

and military recruiters. While CR organizing typically operates with limited resources and staffing, in contrast to the massive advertising and recruiting budget of the U.S. military, the counter-recruitment movement has achieved notable victories in local communities. We find that to be successful, CR groups must utilize strategic framing of their activities to broaden public support. In addition, choosing discreet targets of organizing efforts, careful recruitment of allies, and long-term coalition-building appear critical to positive outcomes. We frame our analysis within a broader context of public support for and acquiescence to a culture of militarism in the United States.

### The Culture of Militarism in America

While mainstream accounts of American history have typically glorified the U.S. military, representations within popular culture have intensified in the post-September 11 era. A recent issue of *Fortune* magazine (March 22, 2010), for example, featured four different covers of uniformed soldiers, all but one holding a rifle, under the heading, "Meet the new face of business leadership." The article noted that major U.S. corporations are actively recruiting "the military's elite." The March 2010 cover of *Vogue*, tagged as the "Military issue," featured female models in military-inspired clothing. "Heavy-duty utility pieces in khaki and olive," it noted, "make up a distinguished urban uniform that commands the season's attention."

In a September 2010 profile, *Men's Journal* lauded the "gutsy" and "ballsy pilots" who fly the Kiowa attack helicopter in Iraq and Afghanistan. While the article included a photo of a bare-chested, smiling pilot, it had no pictures or little mention of the civilian casualties that often result from the use of these weapons. Such examples depict soldiers as modern day "heroes" and "warriors" representing an ideal of American society, and have become deeply embedded within popular culture. These and similar representations are thus so normalized and ubiquitous that they may seem "invisible," as the military is portrayed as vital and desirable, especially in an increasingly "dangerous" world.

Like the growing use of the American flag—on bumper stickers, advertisements, lapel pins—American soldiers are

everywhere imaginable in mainstream culture. As important, the common portrayals of soldiers emphasize themes of bravery and honor, avoiding critical scrutiny of the role played by the military in foreign interventions (like the ongoing wars in Iraq and Afghanistan), or the clear dangers that soldiers face. The rise of the phrase "support our troops," is used ostensibly to offer thanks "to those who do so much to protect us," as a recent advertisement from Goodyear noted. But such references also imply only one acceptable way of thinking about the military, while implicitly providing support for U.S. foreign wars. Sports and other public events routinely utilize the military and those in uniform to promote a distinct form of nationalism and patriotism. Thus militarization takes place not only at a military base, "in the classroom, or on the battlefield (wherever that may be), but instead increasingly occurs in less institutionalized settings such as state fairs, air shows, and car races" (Allen, 2009, p. 10).

Ironically, at a time when the military draft is a distant memory Lutz (2010) suggested that "war readiness is a way of life" in the United States, a phenomenon that permeates public life and social identity, yet is largely devoid of critical scrutiny. She found that a "permanent and massive mobilization for war" has distorted the American Dream by increasing corporate power in the public sector, promoting a culture of government secrecy, and shifting critical resources away from the struggle for social and economic equality (p. 45). The depth of this cultural militarization, she found, is crucial to the lack of public introspection about its implications.

Veneration of the military represents a recent cultural shift: until the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century "military power and institutions" were viewed with "skepticism, if not outright hostility. In the wake of World War II, that changed. An affinity for military might emerged as central to the American identity" as a global power promoting freedom and democracy (Bacevich, 2010, p. 13). As a result, critical debate over the size of the U.S. military budget remains a taboo topic for most U.S. politicians, helping fuel a "permanent war economy." As Lutz observed, "there is no institution that is more revered than the military and whose financial and moral support is thought more unquestionable in the halls of Congress ..." (2010, p. 55).

*Normalizing Military Recruitment*

Of significance for counter-recruitment efforts, the culture of militarism permeates key social institutions in U.S. society, with public schools a prominent example. The use of primary schools for presentations has become an ideal site of socialization by veterans and current soldiers, who use these opportunities to discuss their experiences “defending freedom.” That such events often attract local media coverage further normalizes the role of the military and serves as a potent and free recruiting tool by the armed forces. Another common practice is for primary schoolchildren to assemble care packages or write letters which they send to soldiers serving overseas. Such activities constitute a form of “symbolic recruitment” which educates children “to take the war effort for granted and to view it as desirable, to consider it a privileged form of social participation, rather than question its necessity” (Givol, Rotem, & Sandler, 2004, p. 19).

More pervasive is the growing presence of military recruiters in thousands of secondary schools across the United States. Changes to federal law have gradually increased students’ exposure to the military in various ways. The 2001 No Child Left Behind Act, for example, requires all U.S. high schools to provide the Pentagon with contact information for high school students or face the loss of federal education funding (Tannock, 2005). As a result, recruiters now have access to nearly all students, both directly on high school campuses and via telephone and other communication tools. As a U.S. Marine Corps strategist acknowledged, “the future of the all-volunteer armed forces are seventeen-year-old male high school seniors ... but it is crucial that a recruiter contacts them during their junior year of high school, which is why the provision of student directory information is so critical” (Long, 2006, p. 8). The Pentagon also pays handsomely for information obtained by private data brokers, sometimes illegally obtained by the third party (Goodman, 2009).

Anderson (2009) criticized the growing presence of recruiters in schools for targeting the most vulnerable segment of American youth: low-income students with limited academic and employment prospects. Noting the lack of research about military recruiters in high schools, he finds that this “pipeline

to the military" has largely avoided critical scrutiny while schools have come under more pressure from recruiters: the Pentagon's need for troops has increased since the invasion and occupation of Iraq and, more recently, the escalating war in Afghanistan. In the context of a call for a permanent war against terrorism, troop levels are expected to remain high into the foreseeable future (pp. 267-268).

The need to meet recruitment goals, especially among minority youth, has increased demands on the military and forced recruiters to increase their exposure to school-aged youth. A 2009 study prepared for the Secretary of Defense notes the recent difficulties of the Army in meeting annual recruiting goals, resulting in lowered recruitment standards, recruitment of "more lower-quality enlistees," and "several experimental programs to allow applicants who failed to meet standards to qualify for enlistment" (Asch, Buck, Klerman, Kleykamp, & Loughran, 2009, p. xxii). Future efforts to develop "recruiting incentives" for less qualified Hispanic and African-American youth, such as increased marketing of educational benefits, were encouraged.

The military also obtains a wealth of student information from the results of the Armed Services Vocational Aptitude Battery (ASVAB). The three-hour test is provided free to school districts as a "vocational aptitude" exam, and many cash-strapped districts require their students to take it. Test results are made available to recruiters, who can then use the data to customize their recruitment "discussion" with students. Still, the Pentagon publicly plays down the recruitment potential, claiming that the ASVAB is just a way of "giving back" to communities by providing a public service to schools and often referring to the test as the innocuous-sounding "ASVAB Career Exploration Program" (Castro, 2010).

The growing popularity of computer and video games, many of which trace to Pentagon-funded research to create training simulation for the armed forces, represent a related means that supports a culture of militarism. Ottosen (2009) linked military research and development and the creation of new video games "as instruments for recruitment to the armed forces and as a tool in the global battle for hearts and minds in the so called Global War on Terror" (p. 123). Indeed, the most

popular video games offer players fictional depictions that mimic current U.S. wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, and surreptitiously build support for the American military (Suellentrop, 2010). One such game, "America's Army," requires users to "register" by providing personal data to military recruiters.

### Alternatives to Militarism: Counter-recruitment as One Model

It is within this context of deeply embedded militarism that the practice of counter-recruitment exists. Despite the growth of CR activities, counter-recruiters face significant odds in their efforts to dissuade American youth from joining the military. As suggested, they confront a society that encourages youth—especially males—to demonstrate masculinity (and patriotism) by becoming modern-day "warriors" and joining the military.

In the wake of the terrorist attacks of September 11, CR activists must also grapple with an environment where political dissent is increasingly suspect and subject to being labeled "un-American." This is especially pronounced for those challenging cultural norms about the military and its use. Those involved in counter-recruitment, like other forms of peace activism, therefore face claims of being unpatriotic, undermining the morale of U.S. troops involved in war, and of jeopardizing U.S. security by (unwittingly) supporting "enemies" of the United States (Coy, Woehrle, & Maney, 2008).

Nonetheless, there are successful precedents of efforts to challenge war and militarization; resistance to the Vietnam War is the best known example in the United States. On the home front, draft counseling and conscientious objection (CO) to military service in Vietnam received broad support, fueled by recognition that racial minorities, and poor and working class youth were disproportionately drafted to fight an unpopular war (Cortright, 1975). Draft counseling efforts assisted soldiers and potential recruits by identifying options available to those opposed to serving in the military or who felt that fighting in a war contradicted their personal values. Much like counter-recruitment employs community organizing, draft

counseling utilized similar tactics as a way to deal proactively with the Vietnam war. These activities were an integral part of a broader anti-war activism that reshaped the American political landscape. Despite its disparate nature, "the Vietnam antiwar movement was the largest, most sustained, and most powerful peace campaign in human history" (Cortright, 2008, p. 157).

Lainer-Vos (2006) noted that "more than fifteen million men received legal exemptions and deferments (60% of the cohort)" during the Vietnam War, while about 170,000 "obtained the legal status of CO. As many as 570,000 men evaded conscription illegally" (p. 363). According to Cortright (2008), by the last year of the draft "conscientious objectors outnumbered military conscripts" (p. 167). In 1973 with the draft ended, some activists viewed counter-recruitment as a more practical option of opposing the military than claiming conscientious objector status.

The first national counter recruitment conference was held in Baltimore in 1974, and in 1976 the Task Force on Recruitment and Militarism (TFORM) was formed by those involved in draft counseling campaigns. The group, which later included several national peace organizations, including the American Friends Service Committee and the War Resisters League, served as a network among activists and mobilized in the early 1980s to address the revival of the Selective Service Registration System (Castro, 2008; Friesen, 2010). TFORM represented a precursor to the current environment of local CR organizations focused on challenging military recruitment. As described in our examples, these groups have been active since the 1980s, though up until the current Iraq war organizing efforts were uneven. Despite a lack of media coverage and scholarship about counter-recruitment, CR activists have scored important legal victories, forced changes to local school policies, and broadened their base of support to include parents, teachers, unions, and other key community actors.

### *Goals of the Counter-Recruitment Movement*

In the first empirical study focused on the counter-recruitment movement (CRM), sociologist Matthew Friesen (2010) argued that CRs are involved in five symbolic struggles with

military recruiters (MRs). Friesen's research, based upon interviews with movement activists, owes its theoretical underpinnings to the field of social movement studies and Pierre Bourdieu's theory of "symbolic violence." His analysis revealed that "a series of contests is occurring between CRs and MRs in public schools" over the following:

- *Rendition of Information:* Counter-recruiters resist the efforts of military recruiters to collect and use student information to promote military recruitment.
- *Educational Space:* Counter-recruiters work to restrict the physical presence of military recruiters on the school campus.
- *Heroic Military Narrative:* Counter-recruiters present narratives of military service contrary to those related by military recruiters.
- *Educational Mission:* Counter-recruiters resist efforts to introduce military values into public education.
- *Vocational Visions:* Counter-recruiters challenge military recruiters' descriptions of vocational opportunities provided by military service, and provide alternative career options. (Friesen, 2010, p. 41)

We expand upon Friesen's (2010) model by construing these symbolic struggles as common goals for the CR movement. As Friesen provided the first analysis of counter-recruiters' own perceptions of their work, and in the absence of anything resembling a counter-recruitment movement manifesto, we are confident in re-branding Friesen's five struggles as movement goals. Our analysis illustrates how three high-profile organizers reflect a commitment to achieving the same goals while drawing upon community organizing tactics to advance their agenda. Effective military recruiters essentially practice good community organizing: they talk to the influential people in a neighborhood—a local minister, a high school football coach—and build support for the military as a viable option for young men. The fact that military recruitment relies on organizing principles suggests a need for counter-recruiters to do the same.

The first goal of CR, following Friesen (2010), aims at combating MRs' easy access to private student information. Nearly

half of Friesen's interviewees cited "resistance to these data collection efforts as a central activity" of their local CR organizing activities (p. 20). Recruiting for an all-volunteer military depends on generating reliable leads and contacting young people as early as possible in their high school careers. As a result, military recruiters depend heavily on lists of student data to generate solid leads and gain enlistments. Such data comes from the variety of sources discussed above. Pat Elder, profiled below, is one organizer who has successfully used the tactic of lobbying for legislative changes to restrict military recruiter access to student information at the school district, county, and state levels. CRs who organize around this particular goal often report having an easier time gaining support for their advocacy efforts from parents.

The second goal of CR aims at combating MRs' control over educational space. In many school districts military recruiters currently enjoy almost unlimited access to students: they often represent a grossly disproportionate number of occupational representatives at school career fairs, walk about unsupervised on school property, and at times even intervene to ensure that potential recruits get passing grades so they can qualify for special service after graduation (Geurin, 2009). Since the Pentagon can afford to inundate schools with recruiting resources, the result is that other post-graduation career options are not as well represented in guidance offices, at school career fairs, and in students' post-graduation plans.

Counter-recruiters rely on community organizing tactics in their struggle over MRs' access to educational space. They often stake out their own space within schools to undertake public education efforts (e.g. tabling and distributing literature). They may also engage in advocacy by lobbying local school boards to restrict MRs' access to schools (Hardy, 2005). A remarkable amount of effort goes into both tactics. Organizers must be persistent in trying to reach school administrators in order to secure permission to set up a literature display or "peace table." Furthermore, the legislative achievements that offer CR activists the rare opportunity to see concrete results only come after significant time spent networking and recruiting allies: parents, students, teachers, and school board members.

The third goal of CR organizing aims at challenging what

Friesen (2010) called the “heroic military narrative” endorsed by MRs and reinforced by military recruiting advertisements in the mass media (p. 22). A large share of the Pentagon’s \$1 billion annual public relations budget goes into promoting the notion that serving in the military can be an exciting adventure—witness current Air Force Reserve television advertisements which play on young men’s fascination with extreme sports. MRs’ more personal pitches aim at stimulating pride and nationalism—that only the toughest join the Marines, or that heroism is the exclusive domain of the military. As a counterpoint to this dominant narrative, counter-recruiters seek to introduce young people to information that MRs are likely to leave out of their marketing. In another instance of organizing for public education, many of the brochures and fliers distributed by CRs in schools and at career fairs relate statistics on the number of veterans who end up homeless or on the alarming percentage of women soldiers who experience sexual violence in the military.

In a key tactic used to achieve the goal of challenging the dominant military narrative, CRs organize with veterans’ groups to deliver public education modules. Most of these public presentations take on the topic of “what the military is really like.” Extensive outreach to classroom teachers and students is important here to recruit allies and ensure that counter-recruitment presentations will continue to be welcomed in the future.

The fourth goal of CR seeks the demilitarization of schools. Counter-recruiters are concerned with the way recruiters’ presence in schools contradict “traditional educational values” like creativity and non-violent problem-solving. Indeed, the school-based Junior Reserve Officer Training Corps (JROTC) program shows how “military values that emphasize discipline, hierarchy, conformity, rigidity, uniformity, obedience, and training in violence” can take hold in schools (Friesen, 2010, p. 26).

There are more than 3,000 JROTC programs in all branches of service across the United States and its territories. Although schools pay for most JROTC programming, the Pentagon successfully sells the programs to often poorer and under-resourced communities with the promise that youth involvement in JROTC promotes “discipline” and even reduces the

likelihood that at-risk youth may get involved in gangs. Some public schools and charter schools have gone as far as to revamp the entire curriculum along the lines of a military school (Aguirre & Johnson, 2005). Therefore, in order to resist the rising tide of militarized education, counter-recruitment affirms the educational values of critical thinking and free thought—principles antithetical to the military model of education. To advance their goal of resisting militarized education, counter-recruiters rely on school-specific community organizing tactics such as curriculum development. CRs may also lend their support to student-initiated extracurricular activities like “peace clubs” or social justice magnet schools. As Friesen stated (2010), the “promotion of anti-militarization curriculum and teacher training, radical thought classes, and support of peace clubs” will together “enable CRs to reaffirm traditional educational values” (p. 27).

The fifth goal of counter-recruitment aims at contesting what Friesen (2010) called the “vocational visions” offered by military recruiters. Since the end of conscription in 1973, military recruiting advertisements have heavily promoted the opportunities for career-advancement found in the armed forces (Bailey, 2009; Moore, 2009). Such sustained publicity has been effective in attracting recruits interested above all in the prospects of family insurance coverage or generous sign-on bonuses. With the armed forces now dependent on finding more than 200,000 volunteer recruits annually (U.S. Department of Defense, 2009), young men facing economic pressures and those with few educational opportunities are especially vulnerable to recruitment, resulting in what some label a “poverty draft.” Not surprisingly, military recruitment continues to emphasize vocational and educational opportunities, along with financial incentives to potential recruits. Anecdotal reports of increased recruitment during economic recessions underscore how many enlistees view the armed forces through a pragmatic, rather than a patriotic, lens (Massing, 2008). As Friesen (2010) relates:

Fashioning a future for a potential enlistee through the lens of military experience is one of the most powerful tools at the MR’s disposal. MRs describe military

service as an opportunity to receive technical training that will further a civilian career, provide money for college, offer a way out of difficult life circumstances, infuse a vocation with patriotic service, and secure a sizable retirement pension (p. 27).

Counter-recruiters contest the military's perceived monopoly on viable vocational opportunities by pointing out that many military occupations have no civilian counterpart, making employment upon discharge problematic; that military recruiters cannot guarantee an enlistee will receive the occupation or training of their choice; and that there is a much higher unemployment rate for military veterans than non-veterans. At career fairs or at the growing number of CR-sponsored "social justice fairs," counter-recruiters engage in public education by distributing literature and giving public presentations on non-military routes to learning a trade.

Counter-recruiters also recognize the abundance of research which shows how many young people choose to enlist out of a desire to serve one's country. They may be motivated by such intangible vocational aims as "dignity" and "fidelity," two of the leading themes identified by young recruits in Department of Defense Youth Polls (Eighmey, 2006). Therefore, CRs must "contest the collapse of serving one's country into a strictly military narrative by sharing information about volunteer programs such as AmeriCorps, National Civilian Community Corps, City Year, and other not-for-profit service opportunities" (Friesen, 2010, p. 29). By offering information on non-military alternatives to national service, CRs are making a major contribution to their goal of contesting the vocational visions promoted by military recruiters.

### Counter-Recruitment in Action

In the following we analyze how three counter-recruiters (and their respective organizations) engage in community organizing to achieve the goals outlined above. We chose these "cases" due to the visibility of each organizer in peace and counter-recruitment publications, and based on the prominent roles they play nationally, for example in terms of organizing, public speaking and leading workshops at the 2009 national

conference of the National Network Opposing Militarization of Youth (NNOMY). Our analysis is based on multiple interviews with each of the organizers conducted by telephone during the spring and summer of 2010. Follow-up interviews were conducted via email and telephone. Informants were asked to describe how they became involved with counter-recruitment, what tactics have proven to be the most successful in their organizing, and to identify their larger organizational strategies. In addition, through an analysis of primary and secondary documents related to the work of each organizer and his or her organization, we sought to further assess their different organizing tactics, key barriers they confront in schools and local communities, and the relative success of their efforts. In our second example, in particular, use of these documents helped provide a critical historical assessment of the counter-recruitment movement by exploring the contest over "equal access" in public schools. We note that although all three of the "cases" analyzed here make reference to the goals described by Friesen (2010), this is coincidental; we selected our examples of counter-recruitment prior to learning of Friesen's framework.

*Pat Elder: Plucky Pragmatist.* Maryland-based organizer Pat Elder is a practical organizer concerned above all with getting results. He advocates a legislative approach to counter-recruitment and presents workshops to activists interested in learning about the subject. In his pragmatism he shows the influence of his organizing "guru," Rick Jahnkow, a San Diego-based organizer who has been a consistent critic of the U.S. peace movement's focus on traditional activities—like picketing and marching—that produce little in the way of concrete results (Jahnkow, 1989; Jahnkow, 2006a). According to Elder, the traditional peace movement views "countering recruitment and militarization in the schools as just another tactic to use to fight the wars du jour. On the other hand, many of my colleagues and I with NNOMY feel countering recruitment is *the* strategy to employ to resist war" (personal communication, June 26, 2010).

Elder was not always opposed to the traditional means of protesting wars and militarism in the United States. Having founded a non-hierarchical activist group, DC

Anti-war Network or DAWN, he helped organize one of the first anti-war demonstrations in Washington, D.C. after the attacks of September 11. However, in 2004 he made what he calls a “pragmatic shift” and decided that his efforts would be better spent by focusing more narrowly on the issue of military recruitment. As a parent, a school teacher by profession and a self-described “Bethesda type,” the decision to focus on lobbying school boards to restrict military recruiter access to student information was a natural fit. His efforts, falling under Friesen’s first goal of preventing the rendition of student information, quickly bore fruit (personal communication, May 12, 2010).

As noted, the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 mandates that public high schools hand over their students’ contact information to the Pentagon as a condition of continued federal funding. However, an obscure legal loophole allows parents or students to “opt-out” of what critics see as an invasive procedure. Elder’s first victory was in persuading his own local school district of Montgomery County, Maryland, to require the “opt-out” form to appear on the emergency information card that all parents or guardians must complete at the beginning of the school year. He and other organizers experienced subsequent successes getting the same provision passed in neighboring counties. But when they targeted school districts far from liberal Montgomery County and ran into opposition, “we decided it was time for some legislation.” Elder gives all the credit for what came to be known as the Maryland “opt-out” legislation to State Senator Paul Pinsky (personal communication, May 12, 2010).

Elder has shifted his attention in the last few years to the Armed Services Vocational Aptitude Battery (ASVAB). His efforts to get legislation passed preventing the automatic transfer of student test results to the military is a useful example of community organizing. Elder started by recognizing a pair of organizing challenges that would make this campaign a tougher fight than the opt-out efforts. First, the military would put all its organizing efforts into blocking passage of any ASVAB bill. As Elder noted:

The military didn’t fight the “opt-out” (legislation).  
... It didn’t matter to the military, because the military

can get names and phone numbers from a bunch of other sources. The ASVAB is different. The military really counts on the ASVAB because they get career information, demographics—they get four hours of getting into a kid's head! (personal communication, May 12, 2010)

Elder also faced a second organizing challenge: he would not be able to count on a sturdy advocate in government, having recognized before starting the campaign that his old ally Sen. Paul Pinsky would be perceived as too liberal to shepherd this bill through the Maryland Senate. To head off the two challenges, he had to secure stronger support in the community by recruiting new allies and coalition building. Elder was instrumental in founding Maryland Coalition to Protect Student Privacy, and gained support for the bill from the ACLU, the NACCP, and the Maryland PTA. Along with recruiting allies and coalition-building, the group was also careful to properly frame the public messages they were broadcasting. "We never allowed anybody to suggest that we were anti-war people" (personal communication, May 12, 2010). He credits this public relations tactic with helping to get the bill passed. As he told attendees of a workshop on legislative approaches to CR at the NNOMY National Conference in 2009: "You can't build a movement out of just the radicals in this country. There just aren't enough of them." Hence, given the realities of the American political scene, networking with groups like the decidedly un-radical local parent-teacher association becomes a fundamental component of counter-recruitment.

*Rick Jahnkow: Doyen of the CRM.* Described above as Pat Elder's organizing "guru," Rick Jahnkow represents the counter-recruitment movement's historian, philosopher, and chief strategist. With thirty years' experience in the San Diego, California area, Jahnkow and the grassroots organization he co-founded, Project for Youth and Non-Military Alternatives (Project YANO) have achieved a number of successes. Among them, probably the most significant was the successful 1986 suit in *San Diego CARD v. Governing Board of Grossmont Union High School*. The decision in *Grossmont*, handed down by the

U.S. 9<sup>th</sup> Circuit Court of Appeals, came at a time when many in the CRM were resorting to litigation as an organizing tactic. *Grossmont* effectively gave counter-recruiters a legal basis for organizing in schools.

Jahnkow has always made tactical use of the alternative press. He writes frequently for journals such as *Draft Notices* on topics pertaining to peace education and counter-recruitment. His careful framing of the public message means that his opinions have remained remarkably consistent over the years. Two points are worth noting. First, he believes that the peace movement, used to thinking primarily in terms of visible, public protest, must shift its emphasis to addressing the “dangerous spread of military ideals and values in society,” which constitutes the “root cause” of unending war and militarism (Jahnkow, 1989, p. 1). Counter-recruitment is the means by which activists can address the “root cause” of war in the places where military values are disseminated—the public schools. The second element of his message targets those who are doing counter-recruitment. Jahnkow urges activists to start thinking strategically and adopt a “long-term vision” aimed at combating the spread of militarism in schools (2006b, p. 19). A long-term strategy would be effective at not only opposing current U.S. wars, he argues, but possibly preventing the outbreak of future wars (2006a). Jahnkow’s emphasis on long-term strategy stems from his experiences organizing in conservative and highly militarized San Diego County. “That long-term perspective is very important. But I feel it’s that way everywhere. Movements in other countries have learned that, but that goes against the grain of our culture—we want immediate gratification” (personal communication, May 27, 2010).

The “Case History” of Project YANO, written by Jahnkow (2006b) to educate other activists in the field, highlights specific community organizing tactics the counter-recruitment movement draws on to achieve its goals. Jahnkow’s primary affiliation, Project YANO, was formed in 1984 at a time when “only a few organizations were engaged in similar efforts” (p. i). At that time, the principle of equal access for counter-recruiters had not yet been addressed in the courts. As a result, Project YANO organizers had to think strategically about how best to use their limited resources to gain access to schools given

that their right to that access was often challenged by school stakeholders. The first year of organizing was therefore spent recruiting allies: targeting classroom teachers, sending out large mailings about the Project YANO classroom presentations and soliciting invitations from teachers. By the second year their effort to recruit allies had extended to guidance counselors, a group targeted with a special mailing "since they are frequently the primary source of information for high school students looking for career and college opportunities" (p. 5). During those first two years, when Project YANO activists were delivering classroom presentations and reaching out to guidance counselors, the group was both countering the "heroic military narrative" and providing information on non-military career options (Friesen's [2010] third and fifth goals, respectively).

In 1988, Project YANO shifted its focus to Friesen's (2010) first goal when they launched a campaign to raise awareness of equal access and privacy issues around ASVAB testing in the San Diego Unified School District. Jahnkow and his fellow Project YANO organizers relied heavily on three community organizing tactics during this campaign: letter-writing, advocacy, and recruiting allies. A letter-writing campaign led by parents and religious groups, including the San Diego County Ecumenical Society, lobbied the school district to change its policies regarding the automatic release of test results to military recruiters. Organizers had early on recruited allies among the clergy at the Unitarian church attended by the district Superintendent, and this association paid off. As Jahnkow relates, "even at his own church, Superintendent Payzant was approached by people asking him to do something to stop ASVAB testing" (2006b, p. 12). Ultimately, the district and Project YANO reached a compromise on a policy which held that the district "would no longer allow students to take the ASVAB unless they got a parent's signature on an acknowledgment form that explicitly asked if they wanted recruiters to receive their child's scores" (p. 12). According to some accounts, the new policy had the effect of halving the number of military recruitment leads generated by ASVAB testing in the district.

It is worth summarizing Jahnkow's own conclusions drawn from the campaigns of the 1980s and 1990s. Three in particular best illustrate the use of community organizing. First, it was

essential to embrace a long-term, incremental approach to building support. The first- and second-year mail campaigns to teachers and guidance counselors exemplify this approach. Project YANO sought to build “community” support first, rather than to risk closing doors in the future by getting turned away at the school board and superintendent level. Second, the group sought to strengthen “organizational credibility” by working “in coalition with community groups” and soliciting “key community endorsements.” Project YANO’s practice of recruiting allies and coalition building with area clergy serve as a good example of this approach. Finally, a letter-writing campaign and lobbying from parents and clergy aided the success of the anti-ASVAB campaign cited above. Jahnkow notes that “complaints about the military from parents, students, community groups and school personnel are effective” (2006b, pp. 19-20).

For contemporary campaigns, Jahnkow holds that there are at least two important tactics to keep in mind while engaged in counter-recruitment work in a highly militarized environment like San Diego. First, it is necessary to control and tailor one’s message to suit different audiences. “You have to speak a language that is understandable to the people you’re addressing and not speak the language of other places, like Berkeley, when you’re in Phoenix,” he noted. Second, considering the difficulty of securing funding and adequate staffing for counter-recruitment work, Jahnkow suggested that “you have to think strategically about what you *do* choose to do, about the approaches you *do* adopt and whether they’re going to have strategic value” (personal communication, May 27, 2010).

*Arlene Inouye: Outreach Artist.* In the months following the 2003 U.S. invasion of Iraq, a speech and language therapist in the Los Angeles Unified School District (LAUSD) was troubled by a question. Arlene Inouye knew that the youth and militarism work done in her area by the American Friends Service Committee (AFSC) was useful. But she wondered if there wasn’t something more that she and her colleagues could do on a local level. Inouye describes herself a union person, thus she approached the Human Rights Committee of her teachers’ union with her question. At that time she did not yet have

a clear idea about specific goals, only an interest in recruiting teachers who would want to develop “some kind of a response.” To her delight, the union was receptive and “doors opened right away” (personal communication, September 20, 2010). One of those doors led to a union-organized teach-in on the Iraq war in June 2003, an event which attracted more than one hundred area teachers. Inouye came away from the teach-in with a list of names that would serve as the foundation for the soon-to-be-formed Coalition for Alternatives to Militarism in Schools (CAMS).

Inouye has been the chief coordinator of CAMS since its founding. Lobbying and advocacy victories by the group include a district-wide policy restricting the disclosure of student ASVAB test results to the military. A public education campaign, Operation Opt Out, has resisted the rendition of student information (Friesen’s [2010] first goal) by more than doubling the number of students who return signed opt-out forms each fall. Another form of public education, classroom presentations, is organized by volunteers working with CAMS’ outreach arm, Project Great Futures. Similar to Project YANO, these classroom presentations seek to achieve the third, fourth and fifth goals identified by Friesen (2010). Inouye’s innovative Adopt-a-School program shows more clearly how community organizing tactics facilitate counter-recruitment work.

Employing a tool-kit approach to Friesen’s (2010) second goal of counter-recruitment (resisting the “physical presence of MRs on the school campus”), the Adopt-a-School program empowers stakeholders in the school community—teachers, parents, or concerned citizens—to take concrete steps toward demilitarizing their local schools. Preliminary work involves strategic targeting of individual schools. In her capacity as mentor to novice teachers, Inouye makes regular visits to many of the schools in her district. This enables her to be a listening post, getting a feel for any special issues that a school may have with regard to military recruiters. Such regular contact with schools also enables Inouye to recruit allies for CAMS from among the staff she encounters. Once target schools have been identified, Point Persons (supportive school stakeholders) work together with a CAMS representative to identify and discuss the chief characteristics of their particular school, determine whether there have been complaints from parents or

students about military recruiters, and to develop a strategy based around that data.

What also makes the Adopt-a-School program unique is its online trove of documents. These materials constitute a program of public education in community organizing. "Strategies for Operation Opt Out," "Working With Union Reps at the School," and "People Skills: How to Frame the Issues" are among the resources available online. As the title of the last document demonstrates, the group places great stress on properly framing the public message in counter-recruitment work. Inouye also cautions counter-recruiters against using anti-military rhetoric in their organizing: "It's not a black or white thing. You have to be really flexible and you have to adjust your message, your approach" (personal communication, September 20, 2010).

The Tides Foundation, which funds other peace and social justice organizing efforts, originally provided CAMS seed money for its Adopt-a-School program which the foundation felt had shown "great promise as a national model" (personal communication, September 24, 2010). The grant allowed CAMS to identify and organize 35 schools. Five years later, 50 schools in the LAUSD have a designated Point Person, and elements of the Adopt-a-School program have been implemented by CRs in other parts of the country, most notably in New York and San Francisco.

As noted, aside from success in lobbying for legislative changes at the school district level, CAMS monitors compliance with the new policies at both the school district and the local school level. Past experience observing school administrators' lax approach to upholding new policies has taught Inouye that "once something passes you really have to have a mechanism in place where you can monitor compliance." To better advocate for demilitarized schools at the school district level, the group initiated a process of creating a military advisory committee on the school board. "We went to the board and they actually formed a committee around us," Inouye noted, "where I drive the agenda and we're able to keep a watch over policies, practices and everything having to do with military recruiting." Aside from Inouye, the committee includes the school district official in charge of secondary schools, as well

as the district supervisor for JROTC (personal communication, September 20, 2010).

Within the Adopt-a-School program, school stakeholders in the form of Point Persons (usually teachers) function as “force multipliers.” Thus the Point Persons often work as CAMS informants in the schools, monitoring compliance with relevant district policy at the school, or alerting CAMS in the event of non-compliance. For instance, a Point Person on the teaching staff at one district school informed Inouye that a military recruiting van was planning to visit the school without gaining prior approval. The point person’s early alert allowed Inouye time to contact the school principal to discuss her concerns. Shortly thereafter, Inouye dispatched volunteers to the school who distributed CAMS literature. Those volunteers were later joined by representatives from the student peace club, also sent to the scene by Inouye. In the end, the principal arranged to have the recruiting command cancel the visit. “That to me was a really exciting example of how when you work things at multiple levels you can actually stop something from happening,” Inouye said (personal communication, September 20, 2010).

## Discussion

Counter-recruitment demands that its activists perform the same sorts of functions normally associated with community organizing. Our analysis illustrates the following implications for CRM strategy: (1) CRs must avoid taking an overtly anti-war position, stressing instead the anti-militarism of the movement. To do otherwise and frame CR as a form of opposition to particular wars runs the risk of alienating key community leaders whose support may be needed to build future coalitions; (2) While the CRM is explicitly inclusive, in that it is multi-generational and multiracial, CR organizing paradoxically needs at the same time to be somewhat *exclusive* in recruiting activists. Not everyone can be a community organizer, and those who lack good interpersonal skills and a feel for the political will fail to advance the movement’s goals; and (3) Given the long-term dimension of this work, CRs would do well to focus their efforts on achieving *some* of the goals

identified by Friesen (2010). With the possible exception of Arlene Inouye, none of these examples of counter-recruitment sought to organize around all five of the goals at once. Indeed, one of the counter-recruiters in this study compared his role in fighting the Goliath of American militarism to the plucky determination of the American bull terrier highlighted in James Thurber's short story, "Snapshot of a Dog." "You pick a bit, you become an expert in it, and you don't let go" (Pat Elder, personal communication, May 12, 2010).

Counter-recruitment organizing starts with recruiting allies to build effective local coalitions. The examples of CR analyzed in this study demonstrate that the best allies are typically school stakeholders: parents and teachers. With a coalition firmly in place, these groups seek to clarify goals and objectives. Counter-recruiters do this by framing their coalition's public message in non-threatening, inclusive language. The activists we interviewed all agree that an anti-war or anti-military message will end up alienating the coalition from the community whose support it needs to survive. If these groups cannot transmit their finely-honed message to enough people, or to those they want to target, counter-recruiters then try to utilize alternative media outlets.

The counter-recruiters profiled here lobby policy-makers and relevant public officials when they want to see concrete (policy) change. They get on the phone, write letters, and reach out to local places of worship to influence decisions. As another means of advocacy, counter-recruiters may get themselves seated on committees. If none exist they may start the process to create one so that there will be some forum to address the concerns of their coalition. And finally, if their coalition isn't getting a chance to be heard, and if those in power won't let them be heard because they are ignoring a law, counter-recruiters first try and cajole them or convince them to come to their senses. And, if all else fails, they litigate.

Current counter-recruitment strategy can be summarized in three key phrases: anti-militarist, long term, and inclusive. CR strategy is *anti-militarist*, not simply anti-war. It is aimed at countering that part of U.S. culture which promotes violence and war as the optimal response to conflict. Anti-militarism is seen by movement organizers as a way to keep the

movement viable for the long-term. One lesson CRs must learn from the Vietnam war is that to focus on individual issues (a specific war) and tactics (like draft resistance) may result in sacrificing long-term relevance for short-term goals (Jahnkow, 2006a). Counter-recruitment is thus a means of resisting not just one war, but the larger culture of militarism whose survival depends in part on young people's passive acceptance of military values and ideals.

CR strategy is also focused on a *long-term vision* of incremental gains. If the CRM had a symbol, it would surely be the tortoise. As the anti-ASVAB campaigns in Maryland and San Diego attest, when activists win, it may be only be one local school district. Thus, as the movement goes forward, activist victories will be measured by the "summation of a series of small, incremental struggles" (Theberge, 2005, p. 16). For CR strategist Rick Jahnkow, "people have to be operating from a very long-term perspective and be willing to accept that you might not achieve real measurable and visible victories quickly, that it requires time, it requires dedication" (personal communication, May 27, 2010).

Finally, CR strategy is *inclusive* in that it is a multi-generational, multiracial movement and needs to be to remain a credible force for change in the communities most heavily targeted by military recruiters. However, there are obstacles to keeping the movement inclusive. Older CRs often have trouble working with the co-leadership of younger, high-school-age CRs. This reluctance reflects an authoritarian thread of movement culture and must be addressed for a truly multigenerational movement to flourish (Jahnkow, personal communication, May 27, 2010). Further, despite its success, CR has trouble attracting attention and respect from the broader peace movement, a problem which will ensure that the counter-recruitment movement remains under-resourced in terms of volunteer recruitment and fundraising. Interestingly, Rick Jahnkow (2009) identified class divisions as a barrier to greater (movement) solidarity: peace activists "generally come from a more affluent part of society than those who are targeted by recruiters." As a result,

Those of us who have been doing this work have sometimes felt that the struggle to educate the peace

movement about the social injustice dimensions of this problem has been just as frustrating at times as trying to break through the pro-military biases of school officials. (p. 2)

As important, CR activists recognize the ways that public policy serves to reinforce a culture of militarism. At over six-hundred pages, the mammoth No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act of 2001 is the best-known example of such legislation. Section 9528 of the bill requires all U.S. high schools to provide the Pentagon with contact information for their students or face the loss of federal education funding. That directive was added in the final hour “by a Louisiana congressman who was offended that some high schools chose to protect their students’ privacy by not giving out student information to military recruiters” (Anderson, 2009, p. 275). Parents and students can still “opt out” of having their private information rendered to military recruiters. Indeed, as shown, counter-recruitment organizers have increased the number of students who opt out every year by, for example, lobbying school districts to send opt-out forms home for parents to sign. While such efforts surely make a difference, the lack of an opt-out provision on the national level means that CR successes will retain the limited impact of local campaigns. But even if CRs and their allies were to gain repeal of Section 9528 of NCLB, it would probably fail to have the desired effect. When it comes to collecting the kind of student information most helpful to military recruiters, the Pentagon is hardly dependent on NCLB; it can and does get private student information from elsewhere. Other, lesser-known pieces of legislation (e.g., the National Defense Authorization Act of 2002) give military recruiters practically the same level of access as NCLB (Anderson, 2009).

Although the legislative outlook may be bleak—Congress remains staunchly pro-military and the repeal of NCLB is unlikely—the counter-recruitment movement has to exploit what little advantage it has within the existing legal framework. For example, Section 9528 of NCLB not only includes the mandate noted above, it also requires that military recruiters be given the same level of student access enjoyed by other types of recruiters. An example of what the CRM could do

with this “equal access” provision is provided by the students of Watervliet High School in New York State. Fed up with the military recruiters who stalked the school cafeterias almost on a daily basis, Watervliet students and their adult allies successfully lobbied their local school board to pass a policy limiting visits by *all* types of recruiters to one per month (Geurin, 2009). As their example shows, there is a growing recognition that effective counter-recruitment can be done even when schools are forced to open their doors to military recruiters.

Regardless of tensions with the broader peace movement, and despite legislative obstacles that make it difficult to eliminate militarism in schools, since the 1980s counter-recruiters have scored significant victories. Project YANO’s successful use of litigation as a tactic won the equal access rights critical to counter-recruitment in schools. And as the military devised new methods of securing the private information of students, CRs joined outraged parents and teachers in launching a counter-attack. Organizers like Pat Elder and Arlene Inouye have also successfully used legislative tactics at the state and school district levels. Charting the ways in which the CRM achieves its victories represents an important contribution to the social sciences literature, which until now has all but ignored the counter-recruitment movement.

## Conclusion

Counter-recruitment has been criticized for its narrow focus and lack of engagement with the larger aims of U.S. militarism abroad and structural inequality at home (Tannock, 2005). Nonetheless, though it only has limited support from some national peace organizations, properly understood, CR remains a viable method of addressing U.S. foreign policy and a culture of militarism. In what amounts to a division of labor among antiwar activists, Travieso (2008) identified counter-recruitment as one of three strategic interests to develop out of the U.S. peace movement following the invasion of Iraq (along with targeting multi-national corporations like Halliburton, and lobbying members of Congress to cut off war funding.) Ultimately, he suggested, this “professionalization” of strategy represents a marked improvement over the non-hierarchical and largely ineffective peace movement represented in the

run-up to the war in Iraq. Where does this leave the future of counter-recruitment?

In terms of scholarship, academics and others concerned with the impacts of increased militarism should consider work on this and related topics. Ironically, colleges are being pushed to roll out the welcome mat to the armed forces and increase the university presence of ROTC nationwide (Lewin & Hartocollis, 2010; Nelson, 2010). Instead of uncritically accepting a military presence on campus, colleges and those who teach in them could more effectively confront American militarism through focused research and vigorous public debate. In spite of stereotypes about American universities as bastions of radicalism, these institutions and those working inside their ivy-covered walls have failed to adequately grapple with the reality of U.S. militarism.

The time to turn the tide is now. With Pentagon spending at record levels, the occupation of Afghanistan in its tenth year, a long-term American military presence in Iraq likely, and military operations expanding in places like Yemen and Pakistan, the stakes could not be higher. If colleges are to be more than mere incubators of military values, scholars—social scientists in particular—must critically examine America's culture of militarism and its domestic and global impacts. Research on counter-recruitment as one aspect of peace activism offers such an opportunity.

Despite the utility of Friesen's (2010) study, for example, larger sample sizes are needed to better assess the similarities and differences among groups engaged in counter-recruitment organizing. Evaluation of the success of counter-recruitment is also needed. Field research and in-depth case studies could help explain the strengths and limitations of CR, along with its relationship to other forms of peace activism. NNOMY supports a directory of nearly 150 U.S.-based groups engaged in some type of counter-recruitment and demilitarization work. Absent a national magazine or information source devoted to counter-recruitment, this presents a vital opportunity for scholars and others to follow such activism.

The study of international counter-recruitment efforts offers another line of inquiry, given the lack of such research. In countries with a military situation similar to the United States (no draft, an all volunteer army), there is little evidence

of counter-recruitment organizing *per se*. Instead, we do see a growing interest in the issue of military recruitment and youth militarism in places like the United Kingdom, where Scottish parliamentarian Christine Grahame has criticized the Army for making visits (often uninvited) to elementary schools, high schools and even preschools (Johnson, 2010). In Spain, Canada, and Italy, activists have gone beyond an idle interest in this issue; they have spontaneously organized counter-recruitment events in their schools, colleges and communities.

From the limited information on international CR-related activities we draw two conclusions. First, the United States is the only country with a well-organized network of counter-recruitment groups. Outside U.S. borders the most obvious examples are demonstrations targeting military recruitment kiosks (in Spain and Canada) or against groups perceived to be promoting or profiting from youth militarism (Italy) (Alacant, 2010; Denomme, 2005; Micci, 2010). Second, we suggest that these limited international efforts underscore that the American model of recruiting for the military is uniquely dependent upon the schools. While these countries are similar to the United States by virtue of their reliance on all-volunteer forces, only two (Spain and Italy) ended conscription within the last ten years. More research is needed to determine the extent to which a military recruiter presence in schools grows in proportion to the length of time without conscription. It is interesting, in this regard, to note a possible correlation. Only the United Kingdom has had a longer period without conscription (since 1963) than the United States. Today the UK's school recruitment program is just as robust as the U.S. model. The armed forces seek recruits starting at age 16; army visits to schools are also an integral part of the program.

As opportunities for transnational peace organizing increase, counter-recruitment may emerge as an essential activity in other countries. Trends in key western states indicate a shift away from conscription, and toward all-volunteer, professional armies. At the same time, military forces from NATO countries are increasingly being called upon to support U.S. foreign policy goals—which often means sending troops into combat in Afghanistan or other neo-imperial outposts. This suggests an opportunity for counter-recruiters in the United

States to collaborate with European peace movements with the aim of promoting CR as a viable anti-war organizing strategy.

For U.S. activists, outreach efforts could be as simple as monitoring peace movements outside the United States. They could also involve leading workshops on counter-recruitment at international peace conferences or writing guest editorials on blogs and in magazines read by the European peace community. Regional networks of counter-recruitment activists organizing their own conferences will likely assume a greater role in the future; as an example, we note the contingent of Micronesian counter-recruiters that grew out of the 2009 International Network of Women Against Militarism conference in Guam (Kershner, 2010). Promoting dialogue on issues of mutual concern thus offers the potential to build a CR network in other countries and regions within established peace and anti-war organizations. If successful, such efforts will not only build bridges of understanding between U.S. activists and their international allies, they will also bolster global defenses against militarism at a time of increasingly global war.

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